

**Board of Forestry and Fire Protection  
Range Management Advisory Committee (RMAC)**

**Rangeland Focus Group**

**Minutes  
December 5, 2006**

**Attending:**

**RMAC:**

**Representing**

Ken Zimmerman	California Cattlemen's Association
Mike Connor	Public Member
Clancy Dutra	California Farm Bureau Federation
Neil McDougald	California Cattlemen's Association
Chuck Pritchard	California Assoc. of Resource Conservation Districts
Leonard Hale	Watershed Fire Council of Southern California
Mel Thompson	California Wool Growers Association
Jeff Stephens	CDF / RMAC Executive Secretary

**Members of the Public:**

Sheila Barry	University of California
Daniel Olstein	Nature Conservancy
George Work	Rancher
Richard Morris	Central Coast Rangeland Coalition
Joe Morris	Central Coast Rangeland Coalition
Larry Ford	Consultant
David Feliz	DFG
Tracy Schohr	California Cattlemen's Association
Susan Legrande	California Cattlemen's Association
John Curry	Dixon Resource Conservation District
Joe Rawitzer	
Tacy Curry	CARCD

**Items 1 & 2 Call to Order and Introductions:**

Mike Connor called the meeting to order at 8:00 A.M. Introductions of all present were made.

**Item 4, Private and Public Opportunities for Cooperative Resource Management Activities:**

**Item a - The Central Coast Rangeland Coalition**

Mike Connor asked for Chuck Pritchard to introduce the subject and the guest speakers that were in attendance. Mr. Pritchard introduced the Coalition and posed the question

of what is a reasonable and viable process for monitoring rangelands on the Central Coast. How can good management translate into dollars and cents for the rancher?

Richard Morris identified himself and asked each member of the Coalition in attendance to introduce themselves and state their purpose for becoming involved with the Coalition:

Joe Morris is working with other ranchers, state parks, and scientists. He has discovered a wide range of perspectives of those in favor and against grazing on rangelands. His primary discovery is that there is not a common language for assessing rangeland health; therefore his objective is to develop a common language so that all parties may look at rangelands in a similar manner and understand one another.

George Work is a third generation rancher, or as he explained a person in the business of converting solar energy to valuable products. He explained that he was trained in a monitoring process in the 1960s, but to his knowledge it was never implemented. The challenge as he sees it is persuading ranchers to use a monitoring process once it is developed. He cited the problem of common language specifically as an obstacle that must be overcome and accepted by the scientific community.

Daniel Olstein stated that he represents the Nature Conservancy. They manage land throughout the State and recognize that the ranching community as a whole is in a position to protect ecologic values, and is quite excited about the proposed monitoring process.

Sheila Barry is a UC extension specialist working with landowners in the Bay Area. She noted that there are a variety of systems that evaluate rangeland health, and cited BLM, USFS, and NRCS that have adopted a standard system. She noted that the federal system may not apply to California in all applications, thus the need to explore a system that better fits California conditions. She also noted that the system proposed by the Coalition includes an economic component setting it apart from other rangeland monitoring systems; a more comprehensive tool.

Richard Morris referred the RMAC to handouts that he brought for discussion. He noted that the Coalition received a small grant from NRCS to develop the concept of rangeland health, leading to a methodology for assessing health characteristics that could be measured. Larry Ford (consultant) has been working on this project in cooperation/consultation with ranchers and public land managers.

Richard Morris mentioned the Quivira Coalition of Santa Fe New Mexico as having significant influence on the development of the Central Coast Rangeland Coalition. They started a similar organization about 7 years ago to resolve conflict, and have achieved success at addressing problems with solutions.

Richard Morris cited three publications that also have had influence over the development of the CCRC both by Nathan Sayre, "New Ranch Handbook," "Ranching Endangered Species and Urbanization in the Southwest," and "Working Wilderness." They explore the mix of both public and private values that come together in a working landscape. He further stated that the CCRC is trying to hybridize knowledge of public land managers, private land managers, and scientists and bring them together with a

common language. Mr. Morris circulated documents with the CCRC Mission Statement and Goals.

Richard Morris asked Larry Ford to proceed with a presentation on Rangeland Health Indicators. Mr. Ford introduced himself and stated his main function as a consultant is addressing all concerns on a piece of property including listed species and finding solutions within a working landscape. Mr. Ford covered various topics on the CCRC that included project areas, purposes of the CCRC, CCRC history, need for rangeland health indicators, CCRC progress, the identification of indicators, and results to date.

Larry Ford posed the question of why do we need another monitoring system. He noted that existing systems are not being used. He has concluded that many of these systems are not adequate to measure all of the points of concern for the California situation.

The CCRC hopes to have scientific peer review of the indicators and methodology by December 2006. They hope to test the monitoring system in the spring of 2007.

Key points identified by Mr. Ford in meetings with potential users of the system:

1. Landowners do not wish to be placed into a single category that requires each landowner to measure the same things since the characteristics of each property differ.
2. Landowners provide public benefit as a result of good stewardship for which they should be compensated.
3. Agency representatives wanted recognition of the fact that they are limited by legislative mandates as far as what they can manage for.
4. A management plan is essential for achieving goals.

The number of indicators currently under consideration has been reduced to 11 universal indicators thought to have broad application and 11 special indicators that are for application to individual properties as applicable.

Mr. Ford also identified 10 prerequisites for a rangeland management plan compiled by researchers. He referenced two documents that were relied upon for identifying the prerequisites: An NRCS grazing guidance document and the text by Lisa Bush, "Grazing Handbook."

Tracy Schohr asked at what point does the current financial situation of the rancher come into consideration in the planning process, since insufficient financial resources would prohibit implementation of any plan. Larry Ford stated it should not be excluded. Joe Morris stated that in order for the landscape to be sustainable it must have sufficient financial resources. He stated that with this type of monitoring it should be made clear as to whether the property is economically viable. Joe Morris agreed with Tracy Schohr's point and restated the assertion that a plan must have an economic component that addresses sustainability. Ms. Schohr recommended that the financial aspects of the plan including other sources of income should be addressed early in the process so that the goals and objectives identified are feasible. This would include outside funding sources such as government assistance programs. Joe Morris stated that the intent of this monitoring/planning process is to make money, and therefore result in a financially solvent enterprise. He further stated that if the enterprise is dependent on outside funding sources then the property is not sustainable.

Chuck Pritchard asked what is meant by resource inventories, i.e. natural resources, dollars, etc.? He recommended that “resources” be defined for the end user.

Ken Zimmerman noted that the word monitoring is often misunderstood unless it is well defined, mentioning various types such as implementation, compliance, and effectiveness monitoring. He stated that it is important to select the appropriate type of monitoring if it is to be used for adopting management strategies based on monitoring results. Larry Ford stated that the indicators being developed are intended to be functional indicators as to whether the system is functioning. For example, an indicator that shows higher sediment loads in a stream would then lead to modifications of practices to mitigate the problem. Sheila Barry found merit in Ken Zimmerman’s comment and suggested that CCRC include a section that explains how the monitoring results may be used.

Mike Connor asked if all of the indicators listed are required as part of the monitoring process. Larry Ford responded that the first 11 will be. The third category of indicators is variable as to the numbered monitored. Mr. Connor felt that the proposed monitoring system would be a huge undertaking citing that some indicators would require repeated visits to obtain statistically sound information. Larry Ford stated that some landowners that are interested in specific indicators may only choose certain group to monitor. In the case of public lands it may appear daunting at first but requires considerably less effort than the NRCS method or other methods. He acknowledged that additional resources (perhaps financial and/or personnel) will be required but that the method they have developed is considered to be the minimum needed to be effective.

Joe Morris noted that the indicators can be monitored at various levels of intensities depending upon the end use of the information. Other than number 11 all could be done with relative ease. He stated that the indicators are intended to be useful to managers, rather than a panel of scientists. Mike Connor asked that they consider selecting some that could be monitored with less intensity. Larry Ford stated that we have already paired down from the original list of 40 indicators.

Joe Morris noted that he deals with both public and private landowners and the two demand different levels of monitoring. His state parks clients demand a higher level than the private clients. Managers understand that if they can produce more grass through monitoring (even though monitoring is burdensome) then the incentive for monitoring is created.

Mel Thompson recommended that monitoring item 11 be moved to number 1, because what it comes down to is producing more grass. He posed the question as to whether any of the indicators as presently sampled would stand up to any kind of scientific scrutiny. For example thatch persistence would require more than just a cursory (horseback) survey in order to determine a reliable estimate.

Joe Morris stated that it depends on who wants to know the result. Where disagreement occurs these monitoring indicators can help determine what is the acceptable level for thatch. Mike Connor noted that basically without intensive sampling this type of monitoring is really a reflection of one’s “gut feeling.” Sheila Barry countered that it may not be rigorous testing but valuable information for management could be obtained via a checklist to reference. Mike Connor countered that in the case of aquatic invertebrates a more intensive sample will be required to obtain meaningful data. George Work stated

that we must, however, have something in order to get started with monitoring. He started 20-25 years ago but realized there was no payback for the effort. The idea is to get the industry to realize that there are things to look at. Mike Connor agreed with the importance of having something for the manager to begin with, and that doing something is better than nothing, but then posed the question as to whether different levels of monitoring by users for the same variable will produce meaningful information. He suggested they consider certain variables be selected where standard intensities are employed.

Larry Ford stated that the present effort has resulted in considerable interest and responses including the formation of a science panel. They have also had interest from different regions of the state (Sonoma County).

Jeff Stephens asked for the current status of the model; has actual sampling taken place. Larry Ford stated that actual sampling has not occurred but hopes to have monitoring underway by the spring of 2007. He also confirmed for Mr. Stephens that there are about 30 landowners involved and that the interest has been enthusiastic by both public and private participants. Sheila Barry restated the need for a universally accepted system of monitoring in California.

Leonard Hale noted that especially in the case of public lands management tends to change when people change making it difficult to maintain programs including monitoring programs. Richard Morris agreed restating that illustrates the need for a universally accepted system.

Chuck Pritchard does not disagree with the indicators selected. On his land he tends to focus on end results as the indicators; For example, the health and condition of stream side vegetation, fish populations, and wildlife.

Mike Connor called for a close in the discussion and made reference to other items on the agenda for discussion. He thanked the members of CCRC for their attendance at RMAC and the information shared.

#### Item b - The Dixon Resource Conservation District (DRCD) partnership with Department of Fish & Game (DFG)

Mike Connor asked that Chuck Pritchard introduce John Curry, Executive Director of the DRCD and David Feliz with DFG. Both agencies are partners in management of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area.

Dave Feliz explained that the Bypass has many varied landscapes some of which flood every year. The partnership's intent is to manage the wetlands for wildlife values while maintaining a working agricultural landscape. The primary purpose of the Yolo Bypass is to protect Sacramento from flooding. There is a huge variety of wildlife present, and the area is intensively managed for agriculture.

They also partner with the Yolo Basin Foundation which was instrumental in forming the wildlife Area. Local schools routinely use the Wildlife Area for education and exposure of urban school children to natural resource management and agriculture.

The Wildlife Area was established in 1997 originally 3,700 acres in size. In 2007 16,000 acres were added. This raised concerns over the loss of ag lands for production which resulted in several guarantees as a condition of purchase:

1. No land use changes until a management plan was completed and in place.
2. All ag leases would be maintained until after the management plan was completed.
3. All agreements for water delivery and road access would be maintained.

John Curry provided discussion regarding how the DRCD became involved in the project. Much of the interest was founded in the concept that wildlife management and agriculture were not mutually exclusive. The DRCD also looked at it as a funding opportunity for other DRCD programs. The DRCD provides information to DFG regarding farming practices.

John Curry stated that rents and leases from agricultural uses are treated as revenue that is invested back into the Wildlife Area for capital improvements and management. The DRCD receives a 15% administration fee from these funds. Dave Feliz explained that if the funds came direct to the Department overhead would have been about 39%. The 15% admin fee pays for an additional DRCD staff member to handle the ag aspects of the partnership, plus provides for direct financial support to the Wildlife Area.

Chuck Pritchard asked if the need for capital improvements is determined by both parties. John Curry explained that both ag and wildlife needs are met but the decision largely rests with Dave Feliz. Dave Feliz stated that the facilities provided are mutually beneficial to both parties.

Ken Zimmerman asked for the term of the agreement. Dave Feliz stated that the term is 5 years with provisions to renew. He further stated that the primary objective of DFG is management of wildlife habitat, and that DFG is finding that there are various ways to accomplish their goal. Agriculture has proven to be quite successful. In fact there are cases where revenue in excess of cost was generated.

Ken Zimmerman asked how much impact the political process had on plan development. Dave Feliz and John Curry responded stating that the plan was generated on site using local stakeholders. It is therefore driven by local objectives. The impact has been to influence other properties demonstrating to the WCB and others that agricultural management can generate revenue and service wildlife values.

Mike Connor asked if the DFG is using this model in other areas. Dave Feliz responded yes.

Dave Feliz stated that the area is flooded a significant part of the year making management difficult. Yields for crops are typically lower than standard ag lands in the area. However, cost to the farmer per acre in lease rates are less, and the objective of providing habitat is being met. Swanson Hawks are an example. This species is threatened yet they are common in the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. They have also found endangered plant species in vernal pools where grazing has had a long history. Snow geese have begun to use the grazing areas as well. Rice fields that are flooded have turned out to be good habitat for migratory shore birds that nest in Canada. Other predators that follow migratory species such as peregrine falcon are also present.

Dave Feliz stated that between \$250,000 and \$350,000 income per year is invested back into the Wildlife Area.

Mel Thompson asked what percent of the public funding goes to the total budget. Dave Feliz provided the following breakdown:

- \$100,000 from Proposition 99
- \$300,000 Environmental License Plate
- \$187,000 Fire Arms and Ammunition
- \$300,000 from agricultural income

Dave Feliz stated that the draft plan is due out after January 1, 2007.

Leonard Hale asked what the political structure is of a RCD Board. John Curry stated that they can be an elected body or appointed by the Board of Supervisors depending on the RCD.

Leonard Hale asked if the farmer takes the loss if the area is flooded. John Curry explained that it is rare that a spring flood is late enough to destroy an established crop. It may delay planting.

Neil McDougald asked how much is charged for the grazing fee within the Wildlife Area. Dave Feliz stated \$10.00 per acre and that this rate is comparable to industry rates, and accounts for about 1/3 of the income. They also receive a lump sum annual payment of \$94,000 for about 40,000 acres.

Chuck Pritchard stated that the RCD to which he belongs is interested in a similar management approach to the Chimineas Ranch recently purchased by DFG in San Luis Obispo County. They would like to assist DFG in developing a management plan that reinstitutes grazing and provides for water development.

Mike Connor concluded discussion by thanking John Curry and Dave Feliz for attending RMAC.

**Item 3, Review of the October 4, 2004 minutes:**

Minutes were approved with corrections noted by Jeff Stephens.

**Item 5, New and Unfinished Business:**

Mike Connor stated that he wishes to have the CRM certification process placed on the January RMAC agenda. He noted that the method of administering exams and grading exams needs further discussion. He stated that Eric Huff offered to investigate funding these activities from the PFEC licensing fund.

The discussion led to the following conclusion and recommendation for the Full RMAC to consider placing on the January agenda: 1) An update on the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program, 2) continuing education for CRMs, and 3) the CRM certification process. It was further recommended that Jim Bartolome be invited to the January RMAC meeting to address these issues. Jeff Stephens shall initiate contact with Dr. Bartolome.

Tacy Curry confirmed with RMAC that the 2007 meeting schedule would be set at the meeting of the Full RMAC tomorrow. She will coordinate her dates for the GLCI with the RMAC meeting dates.

**Item 12, Public Comment:**

None

Adjourn

**Action Items:**

Motions:

October minutes accepted with changes.

Tasks:

Jeff Stephens will contact Jim Bartolome for attendance at the January meeting.  
Jeff Stephens will obtain copies of the text, "Grazing Handbook" referenced by the Central Coast Rangeland Coalition.